

SPRINGFIELD SERVANTS

LEADER 10

SERVANTS

2000X5.04500



# Abraham Lincoln's Servants and Employees

## Springfield Servants

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

# RETIRED LIVERYMAN TALKS OF LINCOLN

Thomas S. Ary Drove Mar-  
tyred President from Car-  
mi to Shawneetown.

## USED PRAIRIE SCHOONER

Future Great Emancipator  
Proved Genial Companion  
for Young Driver.

1914

SPECIAL DISPATCH TO THE GLOBE-DEMOCRAT.

CARMI, ILL., February 11.—Thomas S. Ary, a retired liveryman of this city, enjoys the distinction of being the only living man in White County, and perhaps in Southern Illinois, who drove Abraham Lincoln overland in a prairie schooner. A decade ago several could lay claim to the achievement, but age has thinned out the ranks and depleted the number. When the great emancipator made his campaign over the Sucker State, he found it necessary to travel by stage in practically half of the state, and in those days a thirty or forty mile drive was nothing out of the ordinary.

"I can well remember," said "Uncle Tom," "of my trip to Shawneetown, Ill., with Abraham Lincoln at my side. In those days the country presented very little of the prosperous physical condition that now greets the eye of the traveler, and the roads were far from good. In October, 1858, Abraham Lincoln came to Carmi by stage from Xenia, Clay County, where he had been making a great speech. He was billed to make an address in Shawneetown, and he inquired of a hotel keeper here, a Mr. Ratcliffe, if there was a trusty young fellow around that could pilot him through the marshes to Shawneetown.

"That was the year I started my livery stable, and Ratcliffe sent a messenger to me, asking me to come up to the hotel, where he made me acquainted with Lincoln.

### Start at 5 O'Clock.

"Young man," said he, "you look like you're pretty plucky. Will you drive me to Shawneetown by noon to-morrow?" I told him that I could try, but that I did not think we could make the trip by noon and leave Carmi at sun-up, as that was the time Ratcliffe suggested that we start. Lincoln told me that we would start before sun-up, then, as he always got up before 5 o'clock, unless he overslept.

"We started the next morning at 5:30. The first thing that struck me sort of queer about the man was the way he did things. I placed a box down for him to step on to step into the wagon. He did not look at the box, but just stepped right up into the wagon. Very few men could do that.

"Lincoln talked a great deal at times, and then for an hour or two he would not say a word. It seemed like he was always studying. He spoke to everybody we met.

"When we got to New Haven he asked me if there was a place where he could get a 'snack.' I told him that a Mrs. Sheridan conducted a grocery there and that lots of people got lunch at her place. We stopped and she set out a whole pan of fresh baked gingerbread and a pitcher of sweet cider. I got away with more of it than Lincoln, although he ate a lot of it. He shook hands with everybody in the store.

"When we drove into Shawneetown, about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, we stopped at an old brick hotel right close to the Ohio River. Several colored men were working near the landing. Pointing at them, Lincoln remarked, 'Young man, those colored men will one day be the cause of a war. You will live to see the day and there will be a great deal of bloodshed before the war is over.' I was greatly impressed with the remark and kept studying about it all the way back.

Gets Ten Dollars.

"Lincoln gave me a \$10 bill and asked if I was satisfied. I told him that he overpaid me, but he would not let me give him back any change and begged me to stay overnight. I did not do so, though, and after feeding my horses started back for Carmi, spending the night at New Haven. I did not stay to hear the speech Lincoln was to make and have often regretted that I did not remain."

Mr. Ary is now past 76 years old and never tires recounting his trip to Shawneetown with the great emancipator. He was 21 years old when he made the trip and quite well remembers many incidents that passed at the time. He says Lincoln was so common in his talk and manner that he soon forgot the importance of the trip and that the sunny nature of the man was so pronounced that he did not speed his horses on as he would have done had a kicker been with him.

# HIRED BY LINCOLN AND JEFF DAVIS

## Death at Waterloo of Man Who Worked for Both Before War.

Special to The Register.

1520  
WATERLOO, Ia., Feb. 12.—John G. Wellein, 79 years old, civil war veteran, who was befriended by Abraham Lincoln, whom he knew

intimately and with whom he was employed for some time at Springfield, Ill., and who also worked for Jeff Davis, died yesterday. He was the father of Maj. George Wellein, Waterloo's chief of police.

In May, 1859, Mr. Wellein, then a youth, living at Aurora, Ill., went to Springfield to work. A companion was with him. When approaching Springfield on foot they stopped at a house where a man was sitting on the porch and asked for something to eat. The man took them in and had a good meal prepared for them.

He was Abe Lincoln.

He refused pay for the meal, but offered work to one of them on the farm. Wellein accepted at \$10 a month, and worked until autumn.

### Ate With Family.

Mr. Wellein was fond of narrating his experiences in the home of the great emancipator. One of the treasures which he kept for sixty years was a little faded photo print of Lincoln, which was the first picture taken of him.

Although a hired man, Mr. Wellein always ate at the table with the family. On the day of his arrival Lincoln turned the boy over to Mrs. Lincoln. His first work was operating a washing machine. From then on his duties were of a general nature—doing chores, feeding stock, chopping wood, making garden.

Often he helped Lincoln to split jack oak into fence posts and rails, which occupation later was to make Lincoln famous throughout the world as the "rail splitter from Illinois."

### Got \$10 Bonus.

When he finished his employment he was paid \$55. Mr. Lincoln in addition gave him a \$10 gold piece for faithful service.

Mr. Wellein worked for Jefferson Davis in the winter of 1858-59, just before his employment by Mr. Lincoln.

Mr. Wellein was born in Bavaria, Germany, in 1841. He came to America in 1853.





*Geo. St. Regis*  
**MRS. CHARLOTTE DE SOUZA, 90**  
years of age, who was a seamstress  
for Mrs. Abraham Lincoln during their  
life in Springfield at Eighth and Jack-  
son streets, is still active. She resides  
at 1205 East Jefferson street.

(Photo by Neef for State Register)

*2/9/30*

# RECALLS DAYS WHEN HE DROVE FOR LINCOLN

Civil War Vet, Now 83,  
Tells How Future Presi-  
dent Hired Him.

BY STERLING NORTH.

Lincoln's boy driver, the 11-year-old race-horse jockey whom he hired to drive his carriage for the nine months preceding his nomination as president, still lives in Chicago, a hale, white-haired old man, who cherishes many Lincoln memories.

He is John Comstock, 7229 South Michigan avenue, 83 on Washington's birthday, and he tells of his first encounter with Lincoln with great gusto and humor.

"I was living near the town now known as Lincoln, Ill.," said the old man, "and was riding horses at the races held every week. Lincoln, then a country lawyer of Springfield, heard of my ability to ride and take care of horses. He came up to me on the street, and asked me if I would drive for him.

## Mother O. K.'s Deal

"I've got to stay with my mother," I told Lincoln shyly.

"Would you come with me if I went and asked your mother?"

"Yes," I said, "if ma says so."

"Where does your mother live?"

"Four miles from town."

"Together we got into his carriage and drove to our farm. Mother seemed worried about letting me go. I was only 11 years old, but large for my age.

"I'll take care of him as if he were my own boy," Lincoln told mother. "I'll give him his bed and board and 25 cents a day."

"The bargain sealed, I rode gayly away with this man to Springfield, twenty-five whole miles away. I promised I would return now and then to see my mother and that I would be a good boy.

"For several days Lincoln watched me very closely, stepping into the stable at odd hours and watching me with his horses. But when he saw how I talked to his bays, just as if they were human beings, he seemed satisfied.

## Always a Kind Employer.

"Sometimes he would sit up on the high seat with me when we drove and he was always kind to me.

"His habits were very regular. At the same time each morning I took him to his office, and at the same time in the afternoon I called for him. He had supper at 4 and sandwiches and beer at 6. But Lincoln, of course, never got drunk, though he had wine in the house.

"Robert Lincoln was 2 years older than I and a pretty bad boy, but Lincoln was always kind with him, as he was with everybody.

"I never heard him use a swear word or vulgar language of any kind. His diversion was reading, never any games or other amusements.

"Mrs. Lincoln was the nicest lady you ever saw. She always wore a little shawl fastened with a large breast-pin and beneath the shawl was a white embroidered collar."

In 1860 when Lincoln was nominated and started on his famous stumping tour, Comstock returned to his home in the near-by town and never saw Lincoln again. He enlisted at the age of 13 in the 7th Illinois infantry, company E, and served all through the war.

CHICAGO ILL DAILY NEWS  
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 1931.



JOHN COMSTOCK, 83-YEAR-OLD WAR VET,  
Has a Wealth of Reminiscences of Our Martyred President. He Was an 11-  
Year Old Jockey, Riding Horses in Races Around Springfield, Ill.,  
When Abraham Lincoln Requested Him to Leave the Track and Take 25 Cents  
a Day and Board as Driver and Caretaker of the Lincoln Horses.  
John Held the Job for Nine Months; Then Lincoln Was Nominated for  
President. Comstock Now Resides in Chicago.—Acme-P. & A. Photo.

*John Comstock* *Feb. 11, 1931*



### Serving The Lincolns

Another link in the crumbling chain which binds the Abraham Lincoln family with the living present, has disappeared with the death of Mrs. Charlotte DeSouza, which occurred Tuesday in her home in Springfield. In her early years she was a dress-

maker in the Lincoln home, and made the clothes which Mrs. Lincoln wore when she entered the White House as the wife of the civil war president.

At that time Mrs. DeSouza was Miss Charlotte Rodrigues. She had come to this country with her parents when seven years old, and the family had settled at Waverly. Later they moved to Springfield and then to Jacksonville. It is not known how long she lived here, but she returned to Springfield at the age of 16 and was employed for several months in the home of the Lincolns. After the election of Mr. Lincoln to the presidency the young woman was kept busy making clothes for the woman who was soon to become the First Lady of the land.

Mrs. DeSouza was 92 years old. She was born in the Island of Madeira May 20, 1850. She had lived in the home where she died in Springfield for 66 years. Her death removes another of those who can recall contact with the immortal Lincoln. Soon all will be gone, and their recollections will become memories of those who heard them tell the story or will live in written memoirs of the days of Lincoln. *Sept 1932*

# An Old Story Is Unraveled

By JOHN A. RODGERS

*Midway, Ky.*  
A few years back, when the Midway Presbyterian Church was being remodelled and the cupola taken off, discovered nailed to the wall in the belfry above the bell was a daguerreotype of President Abraham Lincoln. For four years I tried earnestly to find out how, when, where and by whom this picture was placed where it was. After questioning many of the older citizens, both black and white, who have since passed on, I found no one who could give me any information.

Just when I was about to give up finding someone who could throw any light upon the matter, by chance I got into a conversation in regard to the picture with Henry Lee, colored, who is now living in Midway, aged 75, and who remarked to me that he had a picture at home he wanted me to see. I took time out and went to his home, and he showed me a picture of Mary Todd Lincoln hanging on the wall. He gave me the key to the story.

His father, Johnathan Lee, who was carriage driver for the family of Thomas Wallace of the Mt. Vernon neighborhood, had the privilege of meeting both President and Mrs. Lincoln on their visits to Kentucky through his job with the Wallaces. After the emancipation Johnathan Lee and two of his sons joined the U. S. Army and went to Camp Nelson. The father was sent to Washington with a contingent of colored troops to help guard the capital city.

While in that city, knowing the President and Mrs. Lincoln and also their colored housekeeper, who was from Lexington, Ky., he called at the White House to pay his respects. At the door he was met by the colored maid who asked his business. Mrs. Lincoln, who recognized his voice and being anxious to get news from that section, which was her former home, asked the maid to invite Lee in.

It is not known how long the conversation between the Lincolns and Johnathan Lee lasted, but we do know that Mrs. Lincoln took a picture of herself off of the wall and gave it to the Kentucky colored soldier. And Mr. Lincoln also responded with a daguerreotype of himself from one of the nearby drawers.

Johnathan Lee bade his white friends good bye and was pardonably very much puffed up when upon his return to his native state he was able to display such precious souvenirs of his visit to the White House.

Lee came back to the Wallaces and resumed his old job as carriage driver. The Wallaces at that time attended the Presbyterian Church at Midway, and Johnathan was so highly respected by the white congregation that he was permitted to join the white Presbyterian Church.

He continued a devout member and attended that church regularly until his death about 1890.

It is almost a certain conclusion that he placed the daguerreotype given him by his friend and emancipator in the belfry of the church for safekeeping.

8 :

Attica, Indiana

August 4, 1940.

Lincoln Life Ins. Co.

Fort Wayne, Indiana

LINCOLN NATIONAL  
MAIL DEPARTMENT

Referred to

REC'D AUG 6 1940

Answered

LIFE INSURANCE CO.

My Dear Sir:—

Just shortly before  
Mr. A. G. Mitten's death of  
Goodland, Indiana, I was  
telling him of a number of  
stories told to me (when I  
was employed in Danville, Ills.)  
by a colored woman who did  
my laundry. This colored  
woman was Maria Vance  
colored servant in the Lincoln  
home before he was made  
president of the United States.

I told Mr. Mitten that Mrs.  
Dr. Stornes of Washington D. C.,  
the woman almost entirely  
responsible for the Ann Rutledge  
memorial at Salem, Ills.; wanted

me to come to Washington, D.C.  
so she could collaborate with  
me in putting these stories in  
book form, to save for posterity  
Immediately Mr. Mitten suggested  
you as the one to get in touch  
with, as he knew my circumstances  
having known me since I was  
a baby, and had my interests  
at heart. He knew it would  
never be possible for me to go  
to Washington.

I told Mr. Mitten some of the  
stories and he said "They are  
of vital importance in rounding  
out the biography of Lincoln -

As they portray intimately his  
home life. Mrs. Lincoln's true  
position in influencing his career.



and of no small importance  
what truly motivated his stand  
and ultimate decision to free the  
slaves."

These stories without adding too  
would make a book of  
possibly 85,000 words.

I am now 56 years old and  
am not in wonderful health.  
I was sitting here dreaming of  
so much of my happier youth  
when this truly refined old  
colored lady and her Lincoln  
stories came to my mind. So  
decided at last to write you  
as I realized at my passing  
these stories shall be lost forever.

I have forgotten your name  
but in all probability this will  
(over)

reach you anyway. Let me  
hear from you at once if  
you are interested.

Very Truly Yours

Ada Sutton,

202 St. Monroe Str.,

Attica Indiana

August 9, 1940

Miss Ada Sutton  
202 W. Monroe St.  
Attica, Indiana

My dear Madam:

It seems to me that I had the privilege of meeting you on one occasion at Attica and the Historical Society was preparing to erect a marker commemorating Lincoln's address there.

The story of the reminiscences of Mrs. Vance's is *imperfect* and I am wondering whether or not you wrote down the story as she told them to you at the time you lived in Danville. It seems to me that would be quite important but the information you have should be conserved as evidence although I am at loss to know just how to go about to help you.

A book of 85,000 words would contain 175 pages at least. This would necessitate it selling for \$2.00 or \$3.00 if it were to be well bound. So it would appear as if your only approach should be to some book dealer.

If your manuscript is in condition ready for presentation, I should like very much to go over it and possibly make some suggestions but I cannot feel that I can be of any help to you as a medium for publication as our Lincolniana Publishers here does not handle manuscripts of this type.

Kindly let me know just what shape your manuscript is in and a little more detail about when you secured the reminiscences of Mrs. I may be able to help you proceed toward finding a publisher.

Very truly yours,

LAW:ES

Director



Attica, Indiana

August, 14, 1940

Mr Louis A. Warren,  
Lincoln Nat'l. Life Foundation,  
Fort Wayne, Indiana.

My Dear Sir:

I'm sorry I cannot recall having met you. Mr. Mitten did bring one of his friends here on one of his visits. It may have been you. I never attending a meeting of the Historical Society <sup>and</sup> did not even know Lincoln made an address here. I did <sup>and</sup> do know however that on one occasion Lincoln when a circuit rider was in Warren County. He stayed all night in what was then considered the Haines mansion at Independence.

My father was a soldier in the Union Army during the Civil War



On one occasion he met A. Lincoln.  
A little interesting story goes with  
that meeting.

But I must get on with the questions  
you asked concerning stories told  
me by Mariak Vance colored  
servant in the Lincoln home at  
Springfield.

Yes I did take the stories down  
in note form, however I would  
have remembered them as I was  
then the impressionable age of  
16. Her racial dialect was fascinating  
and amusing to me, but Mrs.  
Vance was a very, very intelligent  
woman and deeply loved the Lincolns.  
My first position in Danville was  
in 1899 and 1900. I was cashier in a  
shoe store. Mrs. Vance did my laundry  
I carried it to her. When she wasn't  
able her daughter Mrs. Julia Patterson  
did it. At one time Nan Woodruff

now Nan Woodruff M<sup>c</sup>Kenney  
and myself purchased from  
Julia Patterson some articles  
Mrs. Vance brought from the  
Lincoln home. Mrs. Vance as  
well as Mrs. Patterson told ~~me~~  
stories connected with each  
article. I disposed of my  
purchases, but Nan Woodruff  
M<sup>c</sup>Kenney kept what she took  
when we divided them. I lost  
sight of Nan Woodruff for a  
great many years. Then one day  
here in Attica I discovered that  
she was married to Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Kenney  
and that she still had the Lincoln items.

I told her how important it was  
that proof should be established  
that they were genuine Lincoln <sup>curios</sup>

And with her consent I made  
a number of trips to trace down  
some one who could vouch  
for them and us. Mr. Dale  
Wilson<sup>of Louisville Ky</sup> took me to Crawfordville  
in April of 1938. to find members  
of the Patterson family who might  
shed some light on the subject.

At last I found an old lady  
Miss Lucy Patterson who said  
that a number of Mariash  
Vance's family still lived in  
Danville Illinois - including a  
son Neal Vance. But Neal Vance  
was not fit mentally to help. In  
Lucy Patterson's list was a  
Mrs. Fannie Earnest of  
Champaign Illinois who had  
lived for a number of years in

Marial Vance's home. In  
May 1939 I decided to go to  
Champaign. I got all the  
necessary proof ~~for~~ documents  
from her. She is a very  
intelligent woman. She went  
before a notary with me and  
signed these documents -

She also knew many of the  
stories I repeated and our  
visit was very enlightening to me.  
I'm sure if she is still living she  
would help me put these stories  
in documental form if necessary.

Because she was lovely about  
helping me with these items  
belonging to Mrs. M<sup>c</sup> Kinney.

I'm going to send you a copy of  
some of these documents but



wish that you will return them  
safely. Also photos of items in  
documents I'm enclosing.

Also I'm enclosing one of the  
stories as told to me by Mrs. Vance.  
It needs grammatical and punctuation  
corrections, but it would take  
a long time to recopy and I'm  
mailing it just as I mailed  
to Josephine Chandler Horner of  
Washington, D. C. She was  
completely carried away by it.  
Of course it's an Ann Rutledge  
story and along her line of thought  
I have many amusing stories  
as well. Mrs. Horner suggested  
writing the stories as the book.  
"Grandmother Brown's Hundred Years"  
was written. But I haven't data.

I believe that a serious or a sad story could be interspersed with amusing events.

However all I could do would be to write them in my untrained way <sup>and</sup> have them rewritten and corrected by someone capable of so doing - That was what I thought Mr. Mitten meant by suggesting you. Did I misunderstand him or did he really tell me you had written some books or perhaps only a book on Lincoln? Mr. Mitten seemed to think that as important as these stories were especially in clearing up the false impressions written for no other reason than commercializing - the Lincoln

Paul Life Foundation would  
be willing to finance the book.  
That's the reason I have never  
tried it myself as I have no funds.  
Could not you and I together  
work this thing out. I would  
be glad to share equally what  
financially it might bring.

The notary-at Champaign  
seemed to think every intelligent  
colored person would want a  
copy of the book. Then there  
would be the many interested in  
Lincolneana.

Going back to the Lincoln items  
belonging to Mrs. M<sup>e</sup> Kinney -  
should you want to come to  
see them I shall be glad to get  
them from her if you'll let me

know when you can come  
and have them handy. She  
works at a restaurant and  
would not be at home.

Trusting this lengthy letter  
has enlightened you some  
and trusting that we can  
work this matter out  
successfully I am

Very Truly Yours  
Ada Sutton.



August 23, 1940

Miss Ada Sutton  
Attica, Ind.

Dear Madam:

I regret the delay in replying to your letter of August 14 but I wanted to go over your material and have been trying to think of some way in which we could work together on the proposition.

With reference to the curios we are not especially interested in crockery and have never gathered any of it.

I regret to say that I was not especially pleased with the Ann Rutledge story because it cannot be true. There was never any picture of Ann Rutledge made, therefore, there could have been no picture of Ann Rutledge in the Lincoln family album and furthermore there is no evidence that Lincoln ever had any such feeling toward Ann Rutledge as the story would indicate. You can very well see how a Foundation which relies upon documentary sources cannot sponsor the reminiscences of one who could get so far away from the facts as Mariah Vancoid in this instance. Somewhere I have heard that story before.

While the Ann Rutledge account makes me rather skeptical of some of the other reminiscences of Mrs. Vance, I do know that Robert Lincoln visited her in Danville and must have had a great deal of confidence in her.

If you will prepare your manuscript I will be very happy to read it and check it with facts we know to be historically true, and I think it would be fine to submit it to some publishing concern.

Very truly yours,

LAW:EB

Director

Cities Indiana Apr. 30, 1946

Dear Sir:-

The last of Lincoln items I now have is a book - "Fifty Years In Chains or Life of an American Slave." 1858.

I got this from Maria Vance in 1900 along with other things before mentioned but never had it authenticated as no one seemed to remember her owning it. However she did have a number of books on slavery.

I had entirely forgotten it until a man from east came to buy first editions. He offered me \$50.00 for this book. I had a feeling I should write you. That this book belongs in a Lincoln collection. On the title is "Given to Maria Vance by Abe Lincoln - Write - Sincerely Ada Sutton



May 7, 1946

Miss Ada Sutton  
202 W. Monroe St.  
Attica, Indiana

My dear Miss Sutton:

We regret we did not know you were disposing of your manuscript and other material relating to Mariah Vance. My last letter to you indicates, I think, we would be interested in the material you have accumulated but I do not think we are in a position to pay \$50.00 for the book unless it contains the name of Lincoln which evidently it does not. Would you mind telling us to whom you would dispose of your manuscript.

Very truly yours,

Director

LAW:CRS  
L.A. Warren

[illegible]



May 21, 1946

Ada Sutton  
202 W. Monroe Street  
Attica, Indiana

Dear Madam:

If you care to send the Lincoln book properly insured, we will be pleased to look it over and advise you whether or not we care to acquire it. I do not know how we could come to a just decision without at least first seeing the book. If we do not care to keep it, we will return it insured so that you may in no way be running any chance on losing it.

Very truly yours,

Director

LAW:CRS  
L.A. Warren

1912

1912

1912

1912

1912

1912

1912

202 St. Monroe St., Athens Ind.  
6-12-48.

Mr. Louis A. Warren.  
Co Lincoln Life Ins. Co.  
St. Wayne, Indiana.

Dear Sir:-

Recently my mother passed  
aw. In among her treasured  
possession was a daguerreotype  
I had given her years ago of  
Mary Todd Lincoln. It is  
in a fine state of preservation  
 $2\frac{3}{8}$ " x  $2\frac{1}{8}$ " case.

Mrs. Vance colored servant picked  
it up from trash Mrs. Lincoln  
discarded. Mrs. Lincoln said was  
worst picture she ever had taken  
was taken after one of the boys was  
born. If I remember right it was  
William. At any rate I remember  
(over)



her telling me "One child died  
and another was born about the  
same time" & that Mrs. Lincoln  
did look terrible."

I'm enclosing stamp. In case  
you are not interested, would  
you kindly tell me of someone  
who would be..?

I have a friend who has a  
friend (a Mr. Persons of Calif)  
whom she says collects Lincoln  
pictures. However, I think as  
you are so near & I've had  
previous correspondence with  
you it might be right to write  
you first. Attko. I do remember  
you told me once you didn't  
buy only documents.

Sincerely  
(Miss) Ada Sutton,  
202 St. Monroe Str.,  
Attica, Indiana.



June 21, 1948

Miss Ada Sutton  
202 West Monroe St.  
Attica, Indiana

My dear Miss Sutton:

I have just returned today from California which is the reason for the delay in answering your letter of June 12.

Indeed, we would be interested in the Lincoln picture and if you have come to a conclusion as to how much you want for it, we would be pleased to send you a check if the price seems proper.

If you would prefer to send it on for our inspection, we would be willing to offer you what we think it is worth.

Thanking you for giving us first chance.

Very truly yours,

LAW:nn

Director

## The Lincoln “Apprentice”: Part 1

March 21, 2011 [Thomas Schwartz](#) [No comments](#)

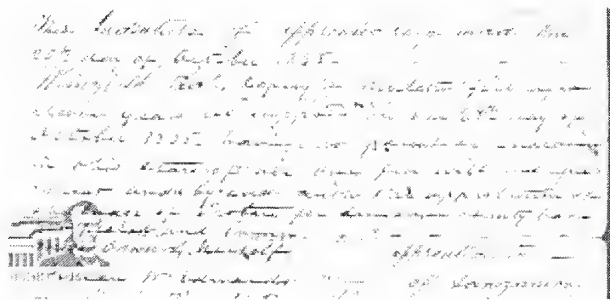
Abraham and Mary Lincoln employed a number of hired servants over the almost two decades at their Springfield residence. Among the many individuals who served them was a black house servant named Epsy Smith. Her association with the Lincoln family undoubtedly accounts for this lengthy obituary that appeared in the

(Springfield) *Illinois State Journal*, on Tuesday, May 10, 1892, p. 1, col. 6:

### *SHE WORKED FOR LINCOLN*

Death of a Negress Who Knew  
Much About Father Abraham.  
Aunt Epsy Smith Passes Away in a Rick-  
etty Tenement House in Chicago —  
Her Eventful History.

“It was in one of the dilapidated old frame tenement houses on Dearborn St. near Sixteenth, Chicago, where the rattle and roar of constantly passing trains never cease, and where such a thing as a garbage cart or street sweeper is unknown, that “Aunt” Epsy Smith died. It was near 1 o’clock Sunday morning that she breathed her last. She was of African descent and unknown, so to speak, in the great metropolis, but she had an eventful life — one of almost historic interest.



The 1835 indenture for Hepsey, a mulatto girl who worked for the Ninian W. Edwards family and, she explained, for the Lincoln family.

Away back in 1827 she was a protégé of Ninian Edwards, at the time governor of Illinois. She was present at the wedding of Abraham and Mary Todd, and after the wedding was a servant in Lincoln’s home. She nursed Robert T. Lincoln, the present minister to the court of St. James, when he was a baby. Her death was caused by the grip, from which she had been suffering since last March. Her exact age is not known, for she was born a slave and no record of birth was made. But as near as could be told she was about 72 years old.

Epsy Arnsby Smith was her name in full and she was born on the plantation of Arnold Spear, near Shelbyville, Ky. The Spears were old friends of Ninian Edwards and shortly after his election as governor Mrs. Spears visited the family and brought Epsy, who was at that time 7 or 8 years old, along as a waiting maid. She was

bright and active and the governor took a liking to her, and when Mrs. Spears was getting ready to return home, she gave the child to him.

When Epsy was a miss, Miss Mary Todd, Mrs. Edwards' sister, came from Kentucky to live with the governor's family. About this time Abraham Lincoln became a frequent visitor at the governor's mansion and he generally asked for Miss Todd. It was Epsy's duty to answer the call and in after years she used to tell her children and grandchildren how she used to usher "Massa Linkum" into the house when he was "a cortin' Mistus Mary."

She witnessed the wedding ceremony when Lincoln was married, and during the first few years of his married life she was his house servant. Then she became engaged to Robert Smith, a colored man living in Vandalia. Shortly before her wedding she came back to live with the family of Governor Edwards and was married at his house by the minister who performed the ceremony for Lincoln. And the dress she wore on that occasion, a black brocaded silk, was a present from Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln.

Years rolled by: Lincoln was elected president; the war came and the slaves of the south were freed. Among the first negroes to come north was "Aunt" Epsy's father, and the proudest day of his life was when his daughter told him that she had worked for the man who had set him free.

In 1861 her husband died and then she sold her little home and moved to Greenville, where she lived with her daughter Mrs. Julia Barbee, until last March, when she went to Chicago to live with another daughter, Mrs. Catherine Jackson, 1630 Dearborn street. Mrs. Jackie Smith, also her daughter, went with her. She had been there but a few days when she became ill with the grip. Enfeebled by old age she lingered along until Sunday morning, when she was taken with a spasm and died. As there was no physician in attendance at the time of her death the matter was reported to Lieutenant Gallagher of the armory, who notified the coroner.

After relating the story of her mother's life Sunday night Mrs. Smith spoke of the anxiety the poor old "mammie" felt lest she should not be buried by the side of her dead husband in the old graveyard at Vandalia. "But we are too poor to send the body there," she continued, "and I am afraid her dying request cannot be granted. I know if Massa Robert Lincoln were here he would help us. But then he is so far away we can't let him know

The funeral will be held today from the dingy tenement house where the old woman died."

The question arises, Was Epsy Smith the same person as an indentured mulatto girl named Hepsey? Indentures were contractual relationships in which minors were taught employable skills in return for having their basic needs provided. Ninian Wirt Edwards, who would become Abraham Lincoln's brother-in-law, signed an indenture of apprenticeship on October 29, 1835, for Hepsey, who was described as "a mulatto girl aged eleven years ...having no parent or guardian." Edwards agreed to provide her "good wholesome (sic) and sufficient meat drink washing lodging and apparel suitable and proper for such an apprentice and needful medical attention in care of sickness and will cause her to be instructed in the best way and most approved manner of domestic housewifery and will cause her to be taught to read and at the expiration of her term of service will give unto her a new bible and two new suits of clothes suitable and proper for summer and winter wear." This arrangement lasted until Hepsey's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Most leading families in Springfield used hired help. Indentures from the period of the 1830s and 1840s showed that blacks and "mulattos" were the source of this hired help. If Edwards was using a phonetic spelling for Hepsey, there is little difference between Hepsey and Epsy. (The same is true with early Lincoln campaign biographies that confused Abram with Abraham.) That Epsy was clearly part of the Edwards household and

witnessed the Lincoln marriage suggests that Elizabeth sent Hepsey to work for her sister Mary after her service ended with the Edwards family. In fact, Hepsey and Epsy were undoubtedly one and the same.

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## Lincoln nanny honored

Sunday, April 17, 2011 03:15 AM

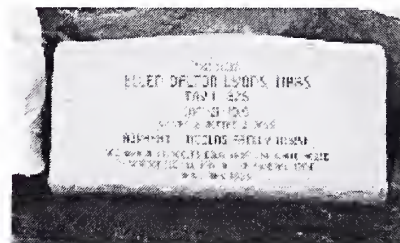
Until yesterday, the grave of the African-American woman who cared for Abraham Lincoln's children was unmarked. Civil War re-enactors and others unveiled a gravestone to honor the Cincinnati native, who first worked for Mary Todd's family in Kentucky. When Todd and Lincoln wed, she signed on as nanny, nurse and housekeeper, moving with them to Springfield, Ill., and then the White House. She later moved to Circleville.



TESSA BARGAINIER/DISPATCH

PHOTOS

Tony Robinson, left, of Circleville, and Terry Whetstone of Springfield, members of the Ohio chapter of Sons of the American Revolution, watch proceedings after unveiling a grave marker for Lincoln family nanny Ellen Dalton Lyons Tibbs. After Lincoln's assassination, Tibbs moved to Circleville to be with her brothers, who were Civil War veterans.



A marker for Lincoln family nanny Ellen Dalton Lyons Tibbs stands in Circleville's Forest Cemetery.

## MORE STORIES OF LINCOLN.

### Call of an Old Servant Upon the President— Her Reception at the White House.

Correspondence of the Indianapolis Times.

DECEMBER, III., August 19.—In a former letter I spoke of a woman now living in Springfield who spent a number of years in the employ of the Lincoln family as a servant girl before the war. Her husband, a patriotic Paddy, enlisted into the army and was severely wounded in the leg at Gettysburg. His wife determined to go to Washington and see the President, hoping to get Paddy discharged and sent home. With her little handbasket of spare clothing she arrived in the great Capital one evening, telling the proprietor of the dingy boarding house where she stopped for the night that she had come to "spake to Misther Lincoln about Paddy." Little did the poor woman dream of the difficulty of seeing the President at that time on any errand. The next morning she was directed past the tall frowning public buildings to the White House, where Mr. Lincoln could be seen. In the vestibule she found seated and strolling about dozens of other persons, men and women of every class, each with his story on the end of his tongue waiting to pour it into the open ear of the President. Mary seated herself in one of the huge chairs, hoping every minute to see Mr. Lincoln walk in. Carriages with liveried drivers came rolling up, the dignified occupants alighting and tripping up the broad staircase; ushers and messengers were hurrying to and fro, but no Mr. Lincoln came. Shortly after noon she approached an usher who seemed unusually conspicuous to announce her mission, but before she had spoken a trio of words he gruffly ordered her back to her seat, telling her to wait till her turn came. When she thought of Paddy the tears came rolling down her cheeks, but the usher was used to that. "These women," he remarked to a bystander, "annoy us to death." Mary awaited her turn, but it never came that day. At 4 o'clock everybody was ordered out of the building, and the doors closed. She picked her way back to her quarters, and there, to the landlord's wife, between her pent-up sobs and tears, told her story. The latter, upon learning that she had once been Lincoln's servant, told her to go again to the White House and inform the irrepressible usher of the fact, and she would be sure to see the President. The next morning, bright and early, Mary presented herself at the Executive Mansion. Already a crowd of waiters had gathered, and the scenes of yesterday were repeated. At 10 o'clock she espied the usher who answered her request the day before. He was standing at the landing of the stairway and bowing to the distinguished Senators and Generals who passed on up to see the President. She pushed her way through the crowd, and

clutching him by the arm, endeavored to tell him her errand, but her emotions got the better of her. "Sure, an' Misther Lincoln will see me," she sobbed. "I wurked for him seven years in Springfield. Tell him," she insisted, "that Mary—wad loike to see him." At the conclusion of this demonstration—such scenes were not uncommon then—she found herself again pushed back to her seat under the peremptory orders of the usher. Some kind gentleman, however, came over to her after a while, and, inquiring her name, wrote it on a card and deposited it along with the score of others that were sent up stairs each hour. Mary had relapsed into perfect submission after her "apaich" and subsequent collapse early in the day, and was still sitting in the high-backed chair, when shortly after the noon hour a buzz in the room aroused her, and looking up she saw descending the stairs the great man himself. It was not the "Misther Lincoln" whom she had seen in Springfield, but the anxious, care worn President of the United States. He held a card between his fingers, and everybody bowed profoundly as he descended. Approaching the usher he spoke a few words, and the latter led him across the vestibule to where Mary sat. Mary blushed and her heart almost flew out of her mouth. She could scarcely utter a word. Now Lincoln easily recognized her, however, and after greeting her, led her through the crowd of astonished lookers-on to the stairway. Pausing at the third or fourth step he instructed the usher to notify all callers that he would be engaged for the rest of the afternoon with an old friend from Springfield. At this announcement Mary felt reassured, and as she passed by the usher who had snubbed her so effectually the day before, she screwed up one corner of her face most contemptuously and added by way of irony a true Hibernian courtesy. The President expressed great delight at seeing her, remarked that Mrs. Lincoln was out driving, but would return soon, and conducted her to one of the handsomely furnished rooms up-stairs. He appreciated Mary because she was the being who knew most about his domestic life in Springfield; she had seen Mrs. Lincoln in her "spells," had heard her abuse of her patient, forbearing husband; had seen the latter quietly steal in and out of his own home. She was now alone with this noble, forbearing man. Being composed and somewhat at ease, she felt free to ask Lincoln how his wife was. Turning around in his chair to see that no one else was listening, his reply was: "Mary, may God pity me, but she's as bad as she ever was." Mary remained in Washington a few days longer, a most welcome guest at the first house in the land. Finally her Paddy was sent down by order of the President to Baltimore, where she joined him and both were given transportation to their home in the West. The President, mindful of Mary's devotion to him when he was a struggling lawyer in Springfield in agreeing to endure Mrs. Lincoln's remarkable disposition for seven years for an extra dollar a week, provided her with a basket of fruits and delicacies to cheer her wounded husband and herself on their journey home. J. W. W.

Aug 26

***Helped Sew Mrs. Lincoln's  
Wedding Gown; Dies at 77***

Blair, Neb., Feb. 9. — (AP) — Mrs. Thomas Gaines, 77, who said she helped her mother make the dress in which Mrs. Abraham Lincoln was married, died today at her home in Kennard, Neb. Among her treasures were several bits of cloth from Mrs. Lincoln's wedding gown.

